

## **June 17, 2018 – Annunciation Episcopal Church**

### **Westley Hodges**

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.

‘The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.’

Everytime I read this Gospel I am drawn closer to the great philosophy Plutarch. Plutarch is the Philosophy that is credited for the whole “what comes first? ...the egg or the chicken.” When studying Philosophy, I really challenged myself to not think like a Christian, but to think for myself and to truly challenge my mind and the things I have learned from the church and from other life experiences. First, I love that the Episcopal Church and Science can be used in the same sentence without getting in trouble. Second, Plutarch’s philosophy of which everything comes from something, so someone or something had to make the first thing... therefor there must be a God, really resonates with my analytical mind. I think this is what Jesus was speaking about in the beginning of this Gospel.

Now, I tend to read the words of Jesus with a slice of sarcasm because my Jesus was a very funny, sarcastic, and loving being. In the second quote of the Gospel today, Jesus said “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it.” And I just imagine Jesus reaching into his cloak and pulling out a list of parables to choose from... (Pull out notecards and start going through a few parables until the mustard seed). Ah-HA! The Mustard Seed!

We all remember this parable from our childhood and some of you may have even planted and grown mustards—my mom probably put mustard greens in my bottle, maybe that’s why I am a vegetarian now. Over the past few weeks, I have really been thinking about this Gospel and what it means, and what I have decided is that it is pretty simple. Faith is believing in something you can’t feel, see, taste, touch, hear, or any other way of proving something is real, it is knowing there is a God, a Heaven, and all other things that go with our beliefs and trusting in that higher power even though you can’t see it. But, Jesus was a smart man, and at the time, microscopes were not invented—but, we now have microscopes and I found a photo of mustard seeds under magnification and I was blown away by what I saw. Mustard seeds are not perfectly round, they almost look like little planets with craters on them. Each seed looks different from the other, no two seeds are identical and no seed is perfectly round. Isn’t our faith just like the mustard seed? Yes, small, but with good courage and patience, God will answer us when we call,

and just like the mustard seed, our faith is unique and unlike anyone else's around us. We can never convince someone to believe exactly like we believe, we can only share our experiences and make room for them to have experiences of their own. In Charlie Dupree's book, *Practicing Imperfection*, Dupree speaks about his experience in yoga class. How one day he was in yoga class and he was competing with the women next time him. She would stretch and he would try to stretch even further than her, until he hurt himself. After talking to the instructor about this inner competition with his yoga neighbor, the instructor reminded him to stay on his mat. Stay on your mat. A phrase that has become a part of my everyday life. Some days I say stay in your lane, just as the signs say on my commute on Interstate 94 to get to this church. Stay in your lane; stay on your mat. Isn't this like our faith? It is "our" faith, not our neighbors, not our family members, but, ours. Stay on your mat.

Being an out gay man, I have had a lot of adversities—and—honestly attacks by other humans. But, living in Chicago, and even when I lived in Atlanta, I often forget that there is still a large amount of people that despise gay people and want to silence us. I grew up in a church that doesn't acknowledge me as a Christian, and I started my career in the Baptist Church and was fired from three churches for being Gay. Trust me, my faith has been tested. Multiple times, even in the last year. But, living in a city that is so pro-LGBTQIAA, you forget that

there are still people out there that disagree with you and your lifestyle—but, this week I was reminded of that three times. Three different times people overstep their boundaries and let me know how they felt about me being Gay—don't worry, it was not anyone here—this community has been amazingly welcoming and I love y'all. But, even through these hard times, my faith is still my faith—no one can take that away from me. I know who God is to me, I know that Jesus loves me, and I know that I am wrapped in the Holy Spirit. My faith is solid. My faith is sound. My faith is mine. Amen.